

Who are you?

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Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 0 0] John chapter 1, starting in verse 19. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you?

He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not.

Are you the prophet? And he answered, No. So they said to him, Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

He said, I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

They asked him, Then why are you baptizing if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet? John answered them, I baptize with water, But among you stands one you do not know, Even he who comes after me, The strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

[1 : 1 1] These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day, The next day, he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who ranks before me, Because he was before me. I myself did not know him, But for this purpose, I came baptizing with water, That he might be revealed to Israel.

And John bore witness, I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, And it remained on him. I myself did not know him, But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

And I have seen and have borne witness That this is the Son of God. Thank you, Karen. This is God's word to us. Amen.

This thing is going to fall over. Give me a second. I'm going to quickly... Okay.

[2 : 4 2] Let's see if this works. In a blog post written a couple of years ago, The self-help spiritual guru called Antasha Durbin Writes the following.

By the way, I forgot all my slides at home, So you're just going to have to listen, okay? Maybe it's a good thing, right? Anyway, Antasha Durbin writes the following. She says, Who am I?

I remember being six years old, Sitting in the back of my mom's car, Trying to figure out who I was And why I was put here on earth. I grew frustrated with my inability to answer This seemingly simple question.

So I did what all rational children do. I turned to my mother for comfort and reassurance. Mom, I posed, Yes, she questioned. Who am I? I asked with a fluttering heart.

You are Antasha, She said, matter of factly. Something inside of me screamed, No! I knew I was more than just my name, That this title didn't define me.

- [3 : 44] So I asked again, Mom, I am not Antasha. Who am I? Of course you're Antasha. That is what I named you, She said. It was then that I realized, She didn't understand me.
- Didn't understand what I was asking. Beyond my name, My title, My age, I needed to understand my true self, My inner self, My higher self.
- I wonder what you think of these words, And Antasha's dialogue with herself. For some of us, Maybe this sounds like just the, You know, Words of a self-centered child.
- For some of us, Maybe you recognize something of the dialogue, And the worldview of our culture, The day in which we live. Look at her particularly poignant statement at the end.
- I think this perfectly capsulates something of the outlook of our generation. She says, I needed to understand my true inner, Higher self. We are working through John's gospel.
- [4 : 51] We're going to come back to Antasha a little later. We're working through John's gospel, And we are busy with the introduction. John chapter 1. And John, The apostle, Wants us to see Jesus. He wants us to clearly know who Jesus is.
- And he's going to get there. We're going to get more interactions with Jesus. But in this passage that Karen read to us, There are two very, Very important questions. Two essential questions that I think every human being must face, Must answer, Must grapple with and wrestle with.
- And if you don't wrestle with these two questions, Or let me put it this way. We all must face these questions, And how we wrestle them, Will have a profound impact on our lives, And our experience of life, And how we live.
- And so let's look at these two questions. The first question is this. Who do you say that you are? Who are you? Who do you say that you are?
- It's the question that this lady, Antasha, Is wrestling with. Right in the passage, The paragraph I read to you, Three times she asks this question. Who am I? Who am I? And she's frustrated by her mom's, Kind of trite and simplistic answer.
- [6 : 02] You aren't Tasha. That's what I named you. But she's grappling at a deep soul level. Who am I really? Friends, Who are you?
- Or maybe more importantly, Who do you say that you are? Well, In our passage today, John, The author of the gospel, Tells us about another man called John.
- John the baptizer. There are two Johns. It's a bit confusing. John the author tells us about John the baptizer. And the passage really focuses On him. And we know a bit about this John the baptizer.
- He was quite a fiery character. He didn't shy away from confrontation. He was a strong personality. And he had come into Israel And he had caused quite a stir.
- The other gospel accounts tell us that He doesn't mind a bit of a confrontation. At one point he says to the religious leaders, You guys are a brood of vipers.
- [7 : 00] You're a pit of snakes. Not the kind of thing you want to say To the establishment. And he says to them, You guys are like a tree. And I don't see any fruit in your lives. And so the axe is at the ready. God is ready to cut you down And to lay you low.
- Okay? That's what he said to the leaders of the day. He's a fiery, confrontational guy. But his message Connected with the everyday people. And so crowds are flocking to John.
- Thousands of people are coming from Israel, From around Israel, From Jerusalem, To hear his message. It struck a note with the people. And so thousands of people are coming To be baptized by him.
- To come to him in faith And coming to God back in faith and repentance. But the religious leaders, They are a little bit unnerved by John. Because he's getting a real following.

There's thousands of people That are going to listen to him. And so they send a delegation to question him. And look at what happens. Look at verse 19. They ask, Then the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem To ask him, Who are you?

[8 : 03] Okay? There's our question. Who are you? He confessed. He did not deny. But confessed, I am not the Christ. Okay? So obviously they ask, John, are you the Messiah? Are you the Christ?

No, I'm not the Christ, he says. So they asked him, Are you Elijah? He said, No, I'm not Elijah. What about the prophet? Are you the prophet that we've been waiting for? He answered, No.

So they said to him, Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? Who are you?

What do you say about yourself? Again, we'll come back to John in a few minutes time. But I want us to think about how that question is so pivotal. How do we answer that question? How do you answer that question?

There's a couple of ways that I think we typically seek to answer that question. One way we answer, Who am I? What do I say about myself? Is in reference maybe to our careers, our accomplishments, our accolades, our status, who we are in society.

[9 : 05] Who are you? I'm a manager at XYZ Consulting Firm. Who are you? I'm a partner at this law firm, right? Who are you? I'm a pastor at Watermark Church.

And so, Who am I? My identity, my self-worth, I look for it in quantifiable metrics of accomplishments, or status, or positions in society. This is who I am. Or maybe, Who are you?

I am Hong Konger. I'm Filipino. I'm African, right? We look for it in some quantifiable metric of accomplishment or achievement. I think this is one of the reasons why sports stars actually so often struggle when they retire from sports.

They're 30 years old, they're multi-billionaires, and they don't know who they are apart from their position on the team. And so many get lost in escapist behavior, gambling or alcoholism, because they don't know who they are apart from their position on the team, right?

Who are you? This is who I am. For some of us, we seek to answer that question, who are you, maybe negatively or in response or retaliation to what others have said about us.

[10 : 10] So, I'm not what my parents said about me. I'm not who my boss is. I am. I'm not who a former lover, boyfriend, girlfriend says I am. My siblings say I am. Who are you?

What do you say about yourself? And all of this trying to find out or discover who we prove who we are is in answer to this question, who am I? And friends, in some ways, this is the assumption behind every Netflix show that we watch, every Spotify song that we listen to, every ridiculous meme on Instagram or Twitter, has this underlying assumption that to be truly happy, you must be free to be whatever you want to be.

You need to find yourself. You need to create yourself. You need to be your own unique identity. But whatever you do, you'll never be happy until you are you. Until you find out your own inner, true, higher, deeper self, and you live that out.

Unless you do that, you'll never be happy. And it's the zeitgeist of our generation. And friends, is this not one of the reasons for the unparalleled increase in depression and anxiety in our generation, that we have cursed ourselves with this impossible task and expectation of not only discovering, but creating this perfect, boundless image of be whoever you're meant to be.

And we put incredible pressure on the next generation, because we tell the next generation, you will never be happy until you find out who you are. Unless you live in perfect, flawless sync with this illusionary image of what it means to be truly free.

[11 : 48] And so we're always striving to be this person that we think we're meant to be, and we can never quite live up to it. Never quite attain it. And we tell ourselves that if you feel any stress or anxiousness or discomfort whatsoever, obviously you have not found out who you are.

Friends, listen to how Antasha Durbin ends off her blog with these, I think, depressing words. She says this, it is up to each of us to unlock the truth of who we are, and to set ourselves free.

We must all wake up and go inside to find ourselves. You can wake up right now and unlock your cage by realizing you are a boundless, endless being capable of becoming or achieving anything imaginable.

That just feels like unbelievable pressure. The only limits that exist are the ones you impose upon yourself. So who are you? Who do you wish to be? It's your time to fly.

Friends, our generation has been trying to fly and they've hit the ground and have hurt themselves. And we wonder why we are so upset and broken and anxious and worried and depressed. Because we've never found a true inner cage free, what does she say?

[13 : 02] Endless, boundless being capable of becoming or achieving anything imaginable. Now, let's come back to our passage. John the baptizer is asked this question.

And the reason he's asked this question, who are you? What do you say about yourself? Is in the first century, there's a lot of expectation, hope about the end times messianic figure. The Israel expected that some great deliverer is going to come to rescue Israel from their enemies, overthrow the Romans, set them free, bring restoration and repentance, restore Israel to its former glory.

And the Old Testament said that at this time, somebody like an Elijah, an Elijah type figure will come and will be a fiery confrontational preacher that will call people back to repentance.

And so they see John and say, John, are you the Elijah? Or Moses said, someone will rise up like me, a Moses type figure, a prophet who will speak God's word to you, call you back to himself.

And so they see Elijah and say, are you the prophet? And then the Old Testament said, the Messiah will come, or a Messiah will come, who will bring Israel back to God. And so they ask him, are you the Elijah figure?

[14 : 09] Are you the Moses figure? Are you the messianic figure? And they're a bit wary because of John's fiery words, but they're also, there's anticipation. Maybe this is the one we've been waiting for. And so there's a bit of, should we be wary of him or should we crown him king?

Maybe this is the Messiah. Let's put him on throne. Let's raise him up. This is John's time to fly in the words of Antasher, right? This is his moment. John can make a name for himself, finally get the recognition and the acknowledgement.

He's been in the desert for 30 years. He's coming to Jerusalem. This is his time to shine. But what does John say? How does John answer this questions?

Look what he says. Are you the Christ? No, I'm not the Christ. Are you Elijah? No, no, I'm not Elijah. Then who are you? The prophet? No, no, I'm not the prophet.

So who are you? I'm just the voice in the wilderness crying out, get ready, make way, get ready for the Lord God almighty. John's saying, I'm just the messenger.

[15 : 15] I'm the unknown, unnamed one who goes before the royal carriage saying, get ready. The King is coming. You know, in Hong Kong, when the chief executive is driving, somewhere, right?

Maybe he's got an important meeting. He's meeting a foreign delegate and his cavalcade goes before him. There are all sorts of cars that go ahead of him. And then there's motorbikes that go ahead of them and they stop all the traffic, all the on ramps, you know, they, they block the roads and they're all these motorbikes that go ahead to make way for the chief executive.

Right? But nobody knows who those motorbike drivers are. I mean, they just are nameless, faceless, nobodies. Nobody knows who they are. John's saying, that's me. I'm just, I'm just a voice.

You don't need to recognize me. You don't need to know my name. If you forget about me, that's okay. I'm a nobody saying there is somebody who's coming. Don't, don't focus on me. Don't worry about me.

I want you to focus on him. I'm a nobody, but make way for the somebody. And so they say to him, verse 25, why then are you baptizing people?

[16 : 16] If you're not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. Now they're not just asking, Hey, that's interesting. So why are you doing this? They're challenging him. They're confronting him. Right? What are you doing? What right do you have to stir up such a crowd?

Who do you think you are? Verse 26, John answered, John says, I am nobody special, but I'm here to tell you about somebody who is.

And that leads us to the second question that this passage asks us. First question, who do you say you are? Second question, who do you say he is? Who are you?

Who is Jesus to you? The powerful and influential members of society come to John. They ask him, who do you say you are? But John's got a more important question for them and a question for us.

And that is, who do you say Jesus is? And friends, the reason why this is such an important question is because you can only answer the first question adequately.

[17 : 25] If you're very clear on the answer to the second question. Okay? Who do you say you are? You'll never get clarity on that answer unless you are clear who is Jesus to you.

The way that God has made us and designed us as his image bearers, who are made to live in relationship with him, made to know him and live in relation with him, to find our identity and our purpose in him, means that we'll never adequately and confidently and securely say, I know who I am and my place in this world, until we're able to say, I know who Christ is and his place in the world.

Listen to how Rankin-Wilburn put this in his book, Union with Christ. He says this, against the prevailing mindset of our day, that says, you are what you make yourself to be.

Okay? Think untouched of him. Christ tells us that you can never discover your real self. Sorry. Christ tells us you can only discover your real self in relation to the one who made you.

Christ tells you, you can only understand who you are in communion with God and with others. You are not, you cannot be self-made man or woman.

[18 : 40] And Rankin-Wilburn is saying the same thing. And throughout this passage, John is constantly saying, I am nothing. Jesus is everything. I am not worthy. Jesus is supremely worthy.

I am not the savior you're looking for. Jesus is the savior. I baptize you with water. Jesus will baptize you with the spirit. And John, the author, the point of this passage is to say, John, the baptizer is a reliable witness.

You can listen to him. You can know him. He felt Jesus. He touched him. You and I haven't felt and touched Jesus in flesh. John is a reliable witness. Listen to John's testimony.

Listen to his confession. Listen to his witness. What is his witness? I am nothing. Jesus is everything. I'm not worthy. Jesus is worthy. I baptize with water.

Jesus baptizes with the spirit. I am not special. Jesus is the one that you need. And John, the baptizer is very comfortable to answer the question, who are you?

[19 : 38] Without any sense of self-promotional aggrandizement, because he settled the answer to the question, who is Jesus? He knows who Jesus is, and therefore he knows who he is.

You see that? Now, so friends, who do you say Jesus is? Do you know who he is? Who is Jesus to you?

And what does that mean about who you say that you are? John wants us to know who Jesus is. So look what he says here. He tells us a couple of things. And so let's look at three things very briefly.

Firstly, John tells us of Jesus' majesty. Look at verse 26 here. He says, I baptize with water, but among you stands one that you do not know who comes after me, the strap of whose sandals I'm unworthy to untie.

He says the same thing, verse 30. This is he of whom I said, after me comes one who ranks before me, because he was before me. Remember, John is Jesus' oldest cousin, right?

[20 : 41] John's mom and Jesus' mom were cousins. I guess John is the second cousin. But as far as we know, he's probably the oldest cousin. That means he is Gorgor, right?

He's the older brother. He is the one of preeminence. John is the guy that gets the first seat at the table. He's older than Jesus. His ministry started before Jesus.

He's on the scene before Jesus. John is the one of preeminence. Jesus is second to him. But look what John says here. No, no, no. I know who Jesus is. He is the eternal, uncreated God, the one through whom everything exists.

Verse 34. This is the son of God, he says. John knows Jesus' majesty means he bows down before Jesus. Look what John says here.

I'm unworthy to untie the straps of his sandals. You know, in the ancient world, a disciple had to do everything for their rabbi, their master. But the one thing a disciple would not do would be to untie the straps of their rabbi's sandals.

[21 : 43] Why? Because everyone wore sandals. It was very dusty, dirty. There's lamb and goat poo all over the roads, especially at the time of Passover. It wasn't a very, you know, your feet weren't very clean.

And so you have to do everything for your rabbi, your master. But the one thing you didn't have to do is untie their sandals. That was like beyond the work of a servant or a slave or a disciple. John says, I'm not even worthy to do it.

If Jesus asked me to do it, I would do it. But, but I don't even presume that high honor of doing that to Jesus. Why? Because of his majesty. This is the son of God.

Look what else John tells us. Look at verse 29. He tells us of Jesus' sacrifice. The next day, John saw Jesus coming towards him and he said, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Now, I'm not sure that John the baptizer really understood the significance of his words. I don't think he really knew what he was saying when he said that. But, by the time the book is written, John the author has seen Jesus die and rise again and he knows the significance of these words.

[22 : 48] What does it mean that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Well, if you know the Old Testament, there's lots of pictures of lambs being sacrificed, substitutionary.

They would die so that something else could live, right? Think of the Passover. Remember, 1,300 years BC. Israel's in Egypt. They're slaves to Egypt.

God says, I'm going to set you free. But how's he going to do it? Through the blood of the lamb. And so, one night in Passover, the night of Exodus, the angel of death comes into Egypt. And the firstborn of every child, the firstborn of every household is going to die.

The angel of death moves in. People are going to die. But God says, if you will sacrifice a lamb and paint its blood on the doorpost of your house, that lamb will die in your place.

And so, all over Egypt, there's crying, there's wailing, there's agonizing as people's children are dying. But in every house where a lamb died in its place, there's life. Life.

[23 : 48] The lamb of God who died, that one died that they may live. Well, think of Abraham, right? In Genesis 23, I think it is. He takes, God says, Abraham, take your son, your only son, Isaac, and go and sacrifice him to me.

Offer him up to me. And Abraham says, God, I don't understand, but if you say it, I'll do it. And so, him and Isaac were walking up Mount Moriah. And Isaac says, Dad, we have the sticks, we have the fire for the altar, but where's the lamb?

Abraham says, God will provide. And they get up on the mountain, Abraham says, Isaac, you are the lamb. You're going to die. I need to offer you a sacrifice to God. And somehow, Isaac agrees, and he ties him down and he gets his knife and he's about to sacrifice his son.

And God says, stop. Do you not put a hand on the boy? And there in the bushes, a ram is caught in the bushes. And God says, sacrifice that ram instead of your son. Isaac lives and the ram dies in this place.

We'll think of Isaiah 53. This great picture of the suffering servant who will die for the sins of his people. Listen to how Isaiah puts it. He says, this suffering servant was pierced for our transgressions.

[24 : 57] He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the punishment that brings us peace. For the Lord has laid upon him the sin of us all. He was oppressed.

He was afflicted like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. So he opened not his mouth. The Old Testament talks again and again about this lamb imagery, this one will die so that others can live.

And John comes along and he sees Jesus and he says, there, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John is radically, radically secure.

Why? Because he knew who Jesus was. The Messiah who would die for your sins and my sins so that we can live. Jesus, the savior of the world. Finally, look at verse 33.

Who does John tell us that Jesus is? Jesus is the one who will baptize us with the spirit. Verse 33. He says, God sent me to baptize with water and he said to me, he in whom you see the spirit to send will remain.

[25 : 59] This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Friends, who is Jesus? He's the one that's going to bring us into personal relationship with God of the universe through the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be baptized with the spirit? The word baptism means lots of things. It means to plunge. It means to immerse. It means to drown. It means to pickle.

You know, there's ancient text where the Greeks, they pickled like some onions or gherkins or something. They use the word baptismo. They baptize the pickle.

It means to fully immerse, submerge in water. Jesus says that when he comes, those who know God will be baptized in the spirit, will be immersed, drenched, drowned, pickled, full of the Holy Spirit.

It means our life is lived in union with God. We are in God and God is in us. No longer doing life on our own with just an hour on a week where we meet God on Sunday and sing some songs.

[26 : 58] No, no. Monday through Saturday in the workplace, in your parenting, in your marriage, on the sports field. You in God and God in you. Immerse one with God. Immerse in his love.

Immerse in his family. Immerse in his intimacy. The sovereign God of all creation in you and you in him. Who is Jesus? Jesus is the one who's coming to answer the longings of our hearts, to dispel the darkness and the anxiety and the loneliness and the fear and to bring us into his family and to plunge us, baptize us in himself, the living God through the spirit.

Friends, this is Jesus, the majestic, uncreated, sovereign God, the sacrificial lamb who died so that you and I can live. Who died that we may live in the power and the comfort and the presence of God's own spirit.

So friends, who are you? Who are you? The only way, one way to answer that is, I'm a partner in the company. I'm a banker. I'm a graphic designer.

I'm a mom. I'm a pastor. Okay, sure. But those things will not last. What happens when you lose your job? What happens when those things fade away? You will not be those things forever.

[28 : 11] Those things will never, ever be enough. Who are you? Are you striving to prove that you're not who your parents or your boss said you are? Friends, that will never be enough.

You'll spend all your days trying to prove them wrong. Friends, there's a better way to answer that question. And that is to know who is Jesus and who are you in Jesus. Friends, if you're a follower of Jesus this morning, you can confidently say, I am not alone because the spirit of the living God lives inside of me.

I am in Christ and Christ is in me. I am a sinner saved by grace. I am intimately loved and known by the most powerful and the most praiseworthy being in all existence.

I am known by him and loved by him. I am justified. I'm accepted. I am welcomed. I am forgiven. I am treasured because Jesus, the Lamb of God, went to the cross for me.

Friends, are you tired of trying to prove yourself, trying to find yourself, trying to create an identity? It is exhausting. John the baptizer is a reliable witness.

[29 : 16] You can trust his testimony. You can trust his confession. John saw Jesus and he knew Jesus and he offers us a far better answer. Come to Jesus and let him define you.

Let him welcome you. Let him fill you. You know what's one of the saddest verses in this whole passage? Look at verse 26 with me. This breaks my heart. John says this, I baptize you with water but among you stands one that you do not even know.

You know, apparently in Jesus and John's day, while John is speaking to the crowds of people, maybe in their very midst, standing amongst them, Jesus Christ, the eternal, uncreated God was in their midst and they didn't even know it.

Jesus who had come to set them free. They're all looking for the Messiah and Jesus is there and they couldn't even see him. Friends, have you seen him? Jesus Christ is in our midst.

He has come to us to bring grace and truth. out of his fullness flows grace upon grace. Jesus is right here with us. Do you know him? Have you encountered him?

[30 : 26] Do you love him? Friends, Jesus come to us and he says, come to me, surrender to me, follow me. Let you find your life in me. Let me be your king, your lord, your master.

Lay down your life and you will find life. Why don't we do that now as we come to him in prayer? Let's pray together. Oh Lord Jesus, God, our generation, I guess like every generation, is anxious and worried, trying to find ourselves, trying to prove ourselves, trying to create an identity that God, apart from you, will never last.

Lord, we confess in this room from me at the front to everyone in the back, every one of us, God, we feel that temptation to find some kind of validation, to answer the question, who are you?

By looking to some other temporary created source. God, show us the futility of those things. May we see through the facade and see you for who you really are.

God, Augustine taught us that our hearts were made for you and we will always be restless until we find our rest in you. Grant us, God, that we may distrust ourselves and view ourselves suspiciously and find our all in thee.

[31 : 44] I pray this in your wonderful and magnificent name. Amen.